



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 5 September 2012*

[\[Video\]](#)

Prayer in the first part of the Book of Revelation (Rev. 1:4-3: 22)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, after the holiday break, we resume the Audiences at the Vatican, continuing with the “school of prayer”, which I am sharing with you in these Wednesday Catecheses.

Today I would like to talk to you about a prayer in the Book of Revelation, which, as you know, is the last one in the New Testament. It is a complex book, but one containing great richness. It puts us in touch with the vital, vibrant prayer of the Christian assembly, gathered “on the Lord’s day” (Rev 1:10): indeed, the text unfolds into this basic premise.

A speaker presents to the assembly a message which the Lord has entrusted to the Evangelist John. The reader and the assembly are, so to speak, the two protagonists of the book’s development; right from the start a festive greeting is addressed to them: “blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear” (1:3). A symphony of prayer wells up from the ongoing dialogue between them and develops with a great variety of forms until it reaches its conclusion. On hearing the speaker deliver the message, on hearing and observing the assembly’s reaction, their prayer tends to become our own.

The first part of Revelation (1:4-3: 22), presents three successive stages in the attitude of the

assembly which is praying. The first stage (1:4-8) consists of a dialogue which — the only one in the New Testament — takes place between the assembly that has just gathered and the reader, who greets it with a blessing: “Grace to you and peace” (1:4). The speaker continues, emphasizing the provenance of this greeting: it comes from the Trinity: from the Father, from the Holy Spirit, from Jesus Christ, involved together in carrying ahead the creative and saving plan for humanity. The assembly listens and when it hears Jesus Christ named it jumps for joy, as it were, and responds enthusiastically, raising the following prayer of praise: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1:5b-6). The assembly, steeped in Christ’s love, feels set free from the bonds of sin and proclaims itself the “kingdom” of Jesus Christ, which belongs totally to him.

It recognizes the great mission which has been entrusted to it through Baptism: to bring God’s presence to the world. And, looking once again directly at Jesus and with mounting enthusiasm, it ends this celebration of praise, recognizing his “glory and dominion” that will save humanity. The final “amen” concludes the hymn of praise to Christ. These first four verses are already full of instructions for us; they tell us that our prayer must first and foremost consist in listening to God who speaks to us. Submerged by torrents of words, we are not very used to listening, or, especially, being receptive by creating silence, either within ourselves or Outside us, so as to be able to pay attention to what God wants to tell us. These verses also teach us that our prayers, especially if they are only prayers of petition, must first of all praise God for his love, for the gift of Jesus Christ who brought us strength, hope and salvation.

A further intervention of the speaker then refers to the assembly, held by Christ’s love, the commitment to accept his presence in its own life. He says: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him” (1:7a). After being lifted up to heaven on “a cloud”, the symbol of transcendence (cf. Acts 1:9), Jesus Christ will return, just as he was taken up into heaven (cf. Acts 1:11b). Then all the peoples will recognize him and, as St John predicts in the fourth Gospel, “they shall look on him whom they have pierced” (19:37). They will remember their sins, the cause of his crucifixion and, like those who witnessed it directly on Calvary, will beat their breasts (cf. Lk 23:48), asking him to forgive them so as to follow him in life and thus to prepare full communion with him after his final Coming. The assembly reflects on this message and says: “Even so. Amen” (Rev 1:7b). The assembly’s “even so” expresses its full acquiescence with of all that has been said to them and they ask that it may truly become reality. It is the prayer of the assembly which meditates on the love of God in its supreme manifestation on the Cross and asks to live consistently as disciples of Christ. And there is God’s answer: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is, who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (1:8). God, who reveals himself as the beginning and the end of history, accepts the assembly’s request and takes it to heart. He was, is and will be present and active in his love in the future, as he was in the past, until the final destination is reached. This is God’s promise. And here we find another important element: constant prayer reawakens within us

the sense of the Lord's presence in our life and in history. His is a presence that sustains us, guides us and gives us great hope, even amidst the darkness of certain human events; furthermore, every prayer, even prayer in the most radical solitude, is never isolation of oneself and is never sterile: rather, it is the life blood of an ever more committed and consistent Christian life.

The second stage in the assembly's prayer (1:9-22) examines in greater depth the relationship with Jesus Christ: the Lord makes himself seen, he speaks, acts, and the community, ever closer to him, listens, reacts and understands. In the message presented by the speaker St John recounts his personal experience of an encounter with Christ: he was on the Island of Patmos, on account of the "word of God and of the testimony of Jesus" (1:9), and it was the "Lord's day" (1:10a), Sunday, on which the Resurrection is celebrated. And St John was "in the Spirit" (1:10a). The Holy Spirit permeated him and renewed him, expanding his ability to receive Jesus who asks him to write. The prayer of the assembly which is listening, gradually takes on a contemplative attitude, punctuated by the verb "to see", "to look". that is, it contemplates what the speaker suggests, interiorizing it and making it its own.

John hears "a loud voice like a trumpet" (1:10b). The voice orders him to send a message "to the seven churches" (1:11), which are located in Asia Minor and, through them, to all the Churches of all times, together with their Pastors. The words "voice... like a trumpet", taken from the Book of Exodus (cf. 20:18), recall God's self-manifestation to Moses on Mount Sinai and indicate the voice of God who speaks from his heaven, from his transcendence. Here the voice is attributed to the Risen Jesus Christ, who speaks to the assembly in prayer from the glory of the Father, with the voice of God. Turning "to see the voice" (1:12), John sees seven golden lampstands and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man" (1:12-13), a term particularly dear to John which means Jesus himself. The golden lampstands, with their candles lit, mean the Church of every time, in an attitude of prayer in the Liturgy: the Risen Jesus, the "Son of man" is among them and, clad in the vestments of the high priest of the Old Testament, carries out the priestly role of mediator with the Father. A dazzling manifestation of the Risen Christ, with characteristics proper to God — that recur in the Old Testament — follows in John's symbolic message.

He describes "hair white as white wool, white as snow" (1:14), a symbol of God's eternity (cf. Dan 7:14) and of the Resurrection. Fire is a second symbol which, in the Old Testament, often refers to God, to indicate two of his properties. The first of these is the jealous intensity of his love which motivates his Covenant with man (cf. Deut 4:24). And it is this same burning intensity of love that is perceived in the gaze of the Risen Jesus: "his eyes were like a flame of fire" (Rev 1:14a). The second property is the uncontainable capacity for overcoming evil, like a "devouring fire" (Deut 9:3). Likewise Jesus' "feet", as he walked on to face and destroy evil, are compared to "burnished bronze" (Rev 1:15). Then Jesus Christ's voice, "like the sound of many waters" (1:15c), has the impressive roar of "the glory of the God of Israel" moving towards Jerusalem, of whom the Prophet Ezekiel speaks (cf. 43:2). Three other symbolic elements follow. They show all that the Risen

Jesus is doing for his Church: he holds her firmly in his right hand — an extremely important image: Jesus holds the Church in his hand — he speaks to her with the penetrating force of a sharp sword and shows her the splendour of his divinity: “His face was like the sun shining in full strength” (Rev 1:16). John is so struck by this wondrous experience of the Risen One that he faints and falls as though dead.

After this experience of revelation, the Apostle has before him the Lord Jesus who speaks to him, reassures him, lays his hand on his head, reveals his identity as the Risen Crucified One and entrusts to him the task of passing on his message to the Churches (cf. Rev 1:17-18). This God was just so beautiful that John fainted before him, falling as though dead. He is the friend of life and places his hand on the Apostle’s head. And this is how it will be for us, we are friends of Jesus. Then the revelation of the Risen God, of the Risen Christ, will not be terrible but will be an encounter with the friend. The assembly too, experiences with John the wonderful moment of light before the Lord but is combined with the experience of the daily encounter with Jesus, perceiving the riches of the contact with the Lord, who fills every space in existence.

In the third and last stage of the first part of the Apocalypse (Rev 2-3), the speaker proposes to the assembly a seven-fold message in which Jesus speaks in the first person. Addressed to the Seven churches located in Asia Minor around Ephesus, Jesus’ discourse starts with the specific situation of each Church and then extends to the churches of every era. Jesus immediately enters into the situation in which each Church lives, highlighting the patches of light and shade and addressing to the church a pressing invitation: “Repent” (2, 5, 16; 3, 19c); “hold fast what you have” (3:11); “do the works you did at first” (2:5); be zealous and repent” (3:19b).... If these words of Jesus are listened to with faith, they immediately begin to take effect. The Church in prayer, on receiving the Word of the Lord, is transformed. All the Churches must listen attentively to the Lord, opening themselves to the Spirit as Jesus asks insistently, repeating this order seven times: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The assembly listens to the message, receiving an incentive for repentance, conversion, perseverance, growth in love and guidance on the journey.

Dear friends, the Book of Revelation presents to us a community gathered in prayer because it is precisely in prayer that we become ever more aware of Jesus’ presence with us and in us. The more and the better we pray, with constancy, with intensity, the more like him we shall be, and he will truly enter into our life and guide it, bestowing upon us joy and peace. And the more we know, love and follow Jesus, the more we will feel the need to pause in prayer with him, receiving serenity, hope and strength in our life. Thank you for your attention.

To special groups:

I am pleased to welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present today, including

those from England, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, and the United States. I am especially pleased to welcome the group of Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit as well as the young men and women of the Focolare Movement who have been participating in this year's Genfest in Budapest. Dear young people, you have taken to heart Christ's call to promote unity in the human family by courageously building bridges. I therefore encourage you: be strong in your Catholic faith; and let the simple joy, the pure love, and the profound peace that come from the encounter with Jesus Christ make you radiant witnesses of the Good News before the young people of your own lands. God bless all of you abundantly!

Lastly I greet all the *young people* present here, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Dear *young people*, on returning from the holidays to your usual daily activities, may you also resume your regular dialogue with God, who instils light in you and around you. Dear *sick people*, find support and comfort in the Lord Jesus, who continues his work of redemption in the life of every person. And you, dear *newlyweds*, may you be able to cultivate the spiritual dimension, so that your union will always be solid and profound. Thank you.

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